

**Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia
Inc.**

"Access to Education"



Federal Conference

2019 Motion Update

March 2020

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Following the ICPA Federal Conference held in Adelaide on 31 July and 1 August 2019, Federal Council began actioning the 95 motions that were passed at the conference.

There have been some developments within several portfolios, and updated information on the progress of the conference motions is as follows:

BOARDING/HOSTELS/SECOND HOME

The Boarding/ Hostels/ Second Home portfolio saw twenty-one motions tabled at the 2019 Federal Conference. Five of these motions were seeking an increase in the Basic Boarding Allowance, which would help alleviate the financial pressure families face due to increased fees by boarding schools and hostels. This is a lobby that ICPA (Aust) has been advocating for over many years, as Trish Mitchell OAM so eloquently phrased it in her presentation in Adelaide,

“The 4th Federal Conference, held in Charleville in 1975, and Agenda item 1 at this, the 48th Federal Conference in 2019. The 1975 motion from Cunnamulla Branch reads, “In view of the fact that boarding fees have doubled since 1970, thus preventing many children from continuing schooling, that Isolated Children’s Allowances should be extended substantially.” The 2019 motion A1, from the Pilbara Branch (WA) is “That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby both the Minister for Families and Social Services and the Minister for Education for a substantial increase to the Assistance to Isolated Children (AIC) Basic Boarding Allowance to take into account the ever-increasing gap between the allowance and the true cost of boarding.”

We work so hard for Government to understand the plight that our members face when educating their children and just when we think we may be getting somewhere, a Minister will change positions, and we need to start over again. This is where we are currently and I wish I could report better news regarding an increase in the Basic Boarding Assistance for Isolated Children. The key is to get Ministers to a Conference to see for themselves how necessary change is, however, that proves challenging also. We shall continue to raise with Government that a substantial increase in the AIC is paramount for our rural and remote families to keep a skilled workforce in outback Australia.

There is some good news regarding AIC. The Minister for Government Services, Hon Stuart Robert MP has informed us that an online application/renewal system for AIC will be rolled out some time from mid-2020 to mid-2022. We have also heard this from AIC department officials, so we are confident that this action will take place. Once again, this year there have been difficulties faced by a number of ICPA members when applying for/renewing their 2020 AIC. Cancellation letters were received even when the renewal had been sent back in the required time frame during 2019. The Department was notified as soon as this situation arose and measures were taken to rectify the mistake. We also worked with a number of members who had difficulty accessing the AIC hotline (132318) and getting their issues resolved. This process worked well, and we encourage members to make contact with a Federal Councillor if their situation is not resolved in a timely manner.

Work is continuing on raising awareness that the removal of Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) on contributions to employees’ children’s compulsory education expenses, would potentially encourage families to stay in rural and remote Australia, improve recruitment and retention of staff, while encouraging employers to contribute to the increasingly high costs associated with educating children. The Government has stated that employers currently benefit from existing FBT concessions for certain housing-related benefits such as electricity, gas or other residential fuel and holiday travel for employees and their families living and working in remote areas. In the Government’s opinion any further concessions, including for education expenses, would come at a cost to revenue and would need to be balanced against other Government priorities. We shall continue to bring this issue to the forefront whenever possible.

The Minister for Health, the Hon Greg Hunt MP replied to our letter requesting the Federal Government provide mental health resources which will ensure rural and remote children have the capability to cope with dire situations, and to address increasing mental health issues in boarding schools. The Government is investing in programs including *Empowering our Communities*, *Reachout* and the expansion of Telehealth access to psychological therapies which are all available to boarding school students from rural and remote areas. Interestingly, \$98.6 million has been committed to *Beyond Blue* to deliver a school-based mental health initiative called *Be You* which assists early learning educators and teachers to teach children and young people skills for good social and emotional development and recognise mental health difficulties. Boarding schools are eligible to access *Be You* at no cost, and currently, there are over 85,300 individual users registered and 6202 schools participating.

ICPA (Aust) has met with the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) to discuss what can be done by boarding schools with regards to the mental health of students impacted by drought and it was also mentioned during our meeting with *Dolly's Dream* in November 2019. Federal Council appreciates the work several State Councils have done recently in sending out letters to boarding schools in their states, reiterating the mental health concerns of their rural and remote students, hoping to raise awareness of the situation many of these children have been dealing with over the holidays, which helps support this advocacy.

Another concerning topic for members is the Socio-Economic Status Score Methodology proposed by the National School Resourcing Board Review. This comprehensive review in 2018 saw the Government accept all six recommendations made by that Board. This includes that from 2020 the capacity to contribute for a school should be determined based on a direct measure of median income for parents and guardians of the students at a school.

A Technical Working Group has been established by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment to provide advice on refinement and implementation of the Direct Measure of Income to determine the capacity to contribute with particular focus on the impact the new measure has on regional, rural and remote families including boarding schools. The Government believes that the use of parent and/or guardian income in a direct measure is likely to reduce the need for schools to appeal their Capacity to Contribute scores, as these scores are based on actual data collected rather than an average for an area.

ICPA (Aust) has raised concern regarding this measure directly with the Minister's office when we met with him in October 2019. Federal Council has placed a submission into the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee Inquiry - Australian Education Amendment (Direct Measure of Income) Bill 2020 [Provisions]. We are also having conversations with the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA), and Federal Council participated in the Direct Measure of Capacity to Contribute Consultative Reference Group Webinar held by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Skills and Employment on Tuesday 17 March. We shall continue to raise this issue wherever we can, as we are concerned about the impact it may have on our rural and remote boarders. We have also mentioned it with the ICPA State Councils and have asked for feedback and information they may have regarding the impact on schools and ICPA families. We would appreciate any further information that any State Council or Branch may have at this time to help us further this discussion.

COMMUNICATIONS

ICPA (Aust) continues to work closely with the Federal Government, telecommunications companies and other like-minded stakeholders to seek the maintenance and development of adequate, affordable and reliable communications services for families in regional, rural and remote areas,

particularly for educational outcomes. Federal Council continues to be a part of the Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC) and we can bring forward our members' issues to be discussed in the RRRCC forums. ICPA (Aust) also participates in the RRRCC delegations to speak with those in Government, and this provides the opportunity to raise concerns in an additional capacity. ICPA (Aust) is also a member of Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) and more recently was selected to have a representative on the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) Consumer Panel where we hope to further awareness of communication challenges for rural and remote students and their families. There were 21 motions presented and carried in the area of Communications at last year's Federal Conference.

Internet

The majority of communications motions revolved around internet, and seeking appropriate, affordable and adequate internet services for students.

Since the inception of Sky Muster Plus, Federal Council continues to see if it may assist some families, particularly tertiary and boarding students and small school situations. We keep in touch with NBN regarding developments and look forward to any further improvements to assist rural and remote students.

Federal Council would also like to advise members that in areas where ADSL remains, consumers can have both ADSL as well as either NBN fixed wireless or Sky Muster internet services.

COVID-19 virus has seen much discussion of how education will be delivered if schools close. While a serious situation, it also has highlighted some issues such as data restrictions, resourcing and supervision in the classroom that our Distance Education students regularly face, as mainstream schooling families now undertake the same considerations in preparation if their children require schooling from home for a period.

The need for a transportable Sky Muster service solution for families who do not have a permanent address or location for distance education schooling, i.e. in stock camps, fencing camps, droving, etc. has recently been brought forward. Federal Council has been made aware of several distance education families facing further isolation, as their students are unable to participate in online lessons, due to the unavailability of Sky Muster, when a family does not have a permanent address or dwelling to affix it to. A transportable means of delivering internet is needed for these types of families to ensure that their students can join in on lessons, interact with classmates and keep up with schoolwork. ICPA (Aust) is currently raising this situation with the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and The Arts, the Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government, the Minister for Regional Education and Decentralisation and the Distance Education Broadband Working Group.

ICPA (Aust) continues to work with the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications and NBN to ascertain rural and remote students' requirements and any expansion to include additional cohorts such as tertiary students. Just recently, several Sky Muster service providers have announced extended extra bonus data for families for the "school holidays" to try to assist with this situation.

Telephone

Motions around telephone services highlighted many concerns for members regarding fault restoration and repairs. The Government has assured ICPA (Aust) that it continues to have consumer safeguards in place in relation to telecommunication services. These safeguards include the Customer

Ombudsman (TIO). Members who are experiencing protracted difficulties getting service faults resolved should seek advice from the TIO if they are dissatisfied with their service provider.

ICPA (Aust) continues to maintain contact with Telstra to raise members' issues. We can inform members that copper lines will not be disconnected and the Federal Government continues to reassure us of this commitment when we meet with them. Federal Council can also confirm that battery backup and replacement batteries can be provided by Telstra. Telstra can also advise options for Universal Power Supply (UPS) and other systems with backup capabilities.

Alternative Voice Services

ICPA (Aust) continues to consult with the relevant stakeholders and bodies on alternative voice services. Please find our submission into the *Design of Alternative Voice Trials Paper* here - <https://www.icpa.com.au/documents/browse/96/federal-submissions>

CURRICULUM

There were two Curriculum motions presented and carried at the 2019 ICPA Federal Conference. Both of these motions revolved around the inclusion of Primary Production and the processes to provide food and fibre in the Australian Curriculum, along with recognition of how important it is to have correct understanding of these topics.

Federal Council made contact with various Ministers, Members of Parliament and Senators to request that Agricultural Production studies are embedded in the Australian Curriculum, including the actual "where, why and how" of producing food and fibre and that this is taught to all students in schools across Australia to create a better opportunity for understanding. As part of this correspondence, ICPA (Aust) highlighted the critical part Agriculture plays in the Australian economy and the importance of dispelling apparent misconceptions and misunderstandings around agricultural production in Australia. In our October delegation meetings with the Senior Adviser to then Agriculture Minister Bridget McKenzie, we were informed of \$5 million in funding being made available to state-based farming organisations to implement agricultural-related subject matter in schools. This funding has been made available for three years beginning in 2020 through the *Educating Kids about Agriculture: Kids to Farms Grant Program (Community Grants Hub)* <https://www.communitygrants.gov.au/grants/educatingkidsaboutagriculturekidstofarms>. Applications for these grants closed on 26 February 2020.

In addition to our meetings with those in Government, Federal Council has also discussed with groups such as Primary Industries Education Foundation of Australia (PIEFA), Agforce Qld and National Farmers' Federation, the importance of ensuring food and fibre production is part of schools' Curriculum, and how we can support and further its implementation. ICPA (Aust) is now an Associate Member of PIEFA and also has a representative on the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) Peak Parents Stakeholder group where we have been able to include in discussions the need for better inclusion of food and fibre into the Australian Curriculum.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

Once again there was a focus on the value of the Distance Education Home Tutors, with the call for a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) to be established being raised by 8 Branches/State Councils to present this as a conjoined motion again. The need for Distance Education and School of the Air schools to be based in rural and remote locations was also raised once more, along with a request for Federal Council to advocate for a separate category for geographically isolated students

in the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme in recognition of the unique needs of these students.

Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA)

ICPA Federal Council has continued to advocate strongly for the establishment of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA). The topic was raised in a motion letter sent to the Federal Minister of Education, Minister Tehan and other relevant Ministers, Members of Parliament and Senators. The topic has also been comprehensively covered in Federal Council delegation Briefing Papers and during delegation meetings and further raised in correspondence with the Minister in a letter in December. Federal Council recently received correspondence from Minister Tehan's office indicating that the topic should be taken to State Education Ministers citing that "the delivery of school education is the responsibility of the relevant State or Territory. Distance education in government schools is a matter for State and Territory education authorities who have provision for distance education of their students in specific circumstances." This was raised and discussed with representatives from all State Councils at our recent Joint Councils meeting.

Federal Council utilises every opportunity to raise further the request for a DETA within submissions, meetings, delegations and other avenues, along with the opportunity taken within these to raise the profile of the distance education tutor and the extensive and essential role they play in achieving distance education success. A short video shown at Federal Conference demonstrated this and was then released across our social media platforms showcasing the home tutor in distance education schoolrooms across Australia. Most recently it was included in our submission to the Inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments. We encourage all ICPA members to actively highlight the valuable role of the distance education tutor in geographically isolated distance education and School of the Air. Federal Council will continue to advocate for and pursue the DETA at every opportunity; however, this advocacy may need to be executed. It is essential that the valuable role of the distance education tutor is highlighted at every opportunity to enhance our advocacy and build on past momentum achieved on this topic, and we have every intention of continuing to raising and working on the topic wherever possible.

Location of Schools of the Air/Schools of Distance Education

At every possible opportunity, Federal Council strongly advocates that Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education should remain in rural and remote communities. This was raised with the Federal Minister for Education, Minister Tehan. We thoroughly understand the importance of this, and while decisions of this nature are principally state-based, Federal Council will support and advocate along with the States to ensure Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education remain in rural and remote communities and maintain the resources and support provided for geographically isolated students.

Assistance for Isolated Children – Distance Education Allowance (AIC- DE Allowance)

With the changing nature of distance education schools, the request for a separate category for geographically isolated students to be established within the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) scheme was raised with the Minister for Families and Social Services, Minister Ruston to ensure that adequate support and assistance is maintained for these students. Federal Council has emphasised that appropriate assistance needs to continue to be provided to assist with the costs associated with educating geographically isolated students who do not have daily access to appropriate face-to-face schooling due to distance, as per the original intent of the AIC scheme. Further to this, in our Briefing Papers, we suggested a review is needed to ensure the AIC allowance is adequately meeting the needs of geographically isolated students. Within submissions, meetings and delegations and most recently in our submission to the Inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments,

Federal Council has highlighted that geographically isolated students need to be recognised as a unique disadvantage group, who require specialised support and assistance in order to allow them to achieve equitable educational outcomes. Federal Council aims to use every opportunity to highlight and promote the unique needs of geographically isolated students.

Federal Council encourages all ICPA members to actively participate in opportunities to raise the profile of the nature of geographically isolated distance education and the importance and value of providing adequate resources and support for geographically isolated students, who have no other option to access their compulsory education.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

ICPA (Aust) is working very hard to ensure rural and remote families can and will access high quality, affordable early childhood learning and child care; whether that be through Preschool, Long Day Care in rural and remote areas, Mobile Early Childhood Services including Mobile Playgroups or In Home Care.

AIC Distance Education Allowance for Pre-Compulsory School Students and Universal Access to Early Childhood Education

ICPA (Aust) will continue to promote both the extension of the AIC Distance Education allowance to pre-compulsory distance education students and increased access to Preschool/Kindergarten in rural and remote areas, particularly as the Federal Government has provided \$449.5 million to states and territories in 2020, under the National Partnership Agreement to provide Universal Access to Early Childhood Education. This funding should ensure that all children have access to 600 hours of early childhood education the year before school.

Federal Council met with relevant Ministers, Senators and Members of Parliament with an interest in rural and remote education on delegations in Canberra last November, where the need for an Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Review which would include the extension of AIC to those pre-compulsory distance education students studying a recognised program, was discussed along with all other early childhood education and care concerns.

Long Day Care in Rural and Remote Areas

Concerns regarding the plight of Long Day Care services during the prolonged drought were brought to the fore at the last Federal Conference. The Department of Education, Skills and Employment has informed child care services in rural and regional areas that they can still apply for a one-off Special Circumstances grant under the Community Child Care Fund to address any current viability or natural disaster issues such as drought and now bushfires and the COVID-19 virus in particular. By clicking on the link - [CCCF Special Circumstances Funding](#) further information about the program is available. The Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS) for temporary financial hardship can also be of assistance to families struggling with drought, bushfires or other natural disasters and the Activity Test for the Child Care Subsidy can also be waived in certain circumstances.

Federal Council expressed our members' concerns in the recent Universal Access National Partnership Review and the National Quality Framework consultation. It was good to see that the transitional provisions for Early Childhood Teachers have been extended for 2 or 4 years, depending on the state or territory.

Mobile Early Childhood Services

Federal Council has recently received assurance from the Federal Government that funding for ex-Budget Based Funded Early Childhood Services such as Mobile Playgroups is ongoing. Future funding

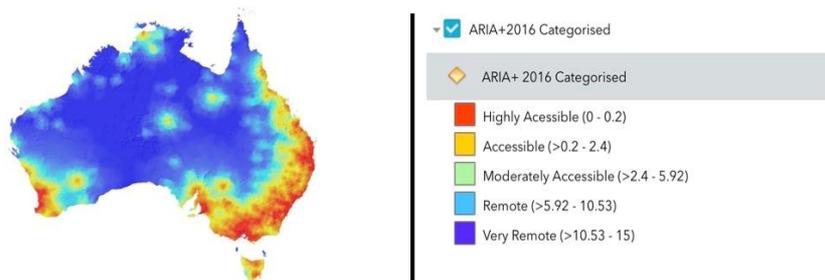
arrangements are being considered, and the Department is committed to ensuring service providers are forewarned of future plans before current grants end. Future grant opportunities will be announced as they come available: www.communitygrants.gov.au and www.grants.gov.au. Federal Council will continue to advocate for the funding to expand the Katherine Isolated Children's Service (KICS) and other Mobile Early Childhood Services into geographically isolated areas and communities where there is no Early Childhood service at all, and for the continuation of opportunities for future funding for their current services.

In Home Care (IHC)

Federal Council continues to advocate for flexibility within the new Home Care model since its inception in July 2018. Many letters have been written to the Minister for Education, rural politicians and the Department of Education, Skills and Employment and we have followed up with this on delegations and whenever the opportunity arose. Federal Council was pleased to hear the announcement just before Christmas that the transitional provisions for IHC have been extended for two years until December 2021, which is included in the updated IHC National Guidelines of December 2019, page 20. This gives IHC educators who wish to work in remote areas an extra two years to start working towards or acquiring the necessary Cert III in ECEC qualification. However, some service providers have been slow to accept this, and there has been confusion over the definition of 'remote and very remote areas' where families reside. Federal Council has just received confirmation from the Department of Education, Skills and Employment that the definition of 'remote and very remote' areas of Australia are classified according to the ARIA+ Remoteness Index criteria of 2016 to mirror National Quality Framework regulations and are as follows:

ACCESSIBILITY/REMOTENESS INDEX OF AUSTRALIA PLUS (ARIA+ 2016)

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Since seeking clarification on the issue of IHC educators supervising distance education, the Education Minister has reinforced the legislation from the Family Assistance Law citing that only caring for children completing their homework and regular child care, but not supervising formal schooling, is permissible in order for the family to receive the Child Care Subsidy (CCS). The Department of Education, Skills and Employment has recommended that a private arrangement between a family and the IHC educator be made to ensure continued care during those 'formal schooling hours', but families will not be able to claim the CCS during that time.

Working with Children Check (WWCC)

ICPA (Aust) continues to work with the Federal Government in the implementation of a national WWCC certification. A national working party is working on this, but it will take some time to complete due to the different rules and regulations of states and territories. Unfortunately, we have received no further news regarding a national certification at this stage, even though an announcement is due, but we will forward any information as it comes available.

Working Holiday Maker Visas

Despite not receiving any motions last year (although there have been in previous years) changes have been made in regard to [Working Holiday Maker Visas](#), which were announced on 17 February 2020 following the bushfire crisis. This ensured that paid or 'bushfire recovery volunteer work' would qualify as 'specified work' for overseas workers and the visa would be increased to 12 months.

Unfortunately, these changes still do not apply to nannies and distance education tutors, though the Minister has indicated that the Government will see how recent developments pan out before considering any more changes.

ICPA (Aust) will continue to work with the Federal Government and other bodies available to us to further ECEC concerns, and we will share any more developments with you.

RURAL SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL TRAVEL

Five agenda motions were raised at the 2019 Federal Conference relating to Rural Schools and School Travel.

Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE) – Final Report

Federal Council has emailed all State and Territory Rural Schools portfolio leaders to extend an invitation to contact us if they have suggestions of ways we can support in furthering this initiative at their appropriate state levels. A link to the final report was also circulated with a request to portfolio leaders for the sharing of real-life scenarios and case studies to help us to present the reality of what our schools are facing in a meaningful and robust way and to help arm us with the pictures that will keep things relevant. The report was also raised with the State and Territory Rural Schools' portfolio leaders at our joint Rural Schools Portfolio teleconference held in November last year.

To date, we have not had any specific requests for support from state councils nor have any scenarios or case studies been shared; however, we will continue to raise this issue wherever possible. If any member, Branch or State Council has any further information or case studies that they can share with us, we will welcome the information. Federal Council will continue to look at ways to support States and Territory Councils in addressing this concern.

Student Concessional Fares

Federal Council has raised this issue directly with relevant airlines as well as in discussions on a delegation to parliament. To date, we have not had much traction given airlines, and relevant transport authorities are reluctant to provide student concessions across the Board however we recognise the genuine need for a solution and will continue to raise this issue wherever possible. We are also attempting to find as many ways possible to address the need for concessional fares, including continuing negotiations regarding discounted regional fares directly with airlines.

Resident Fares Scheme

Federal council has continued our discussions with QANTAS in relation to their Residents Fares Scheme. We welcomed the announcement in August 2019 that QANTAS will invest up to \$10 million each year in providing flight discounts for residents in 16 towns across Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia.

The improvements to the program include the removal of the \$99 flight change fee for new bookings made through the resident fare website. While this does not yet allow for fares to be booked to come home from the capital city, it is hoped that the flexibility provided in being able to change bookings without penalty will allow for trips for boarders' weekends and end of term breaks to be made in

advance. We recognise that although this goes part of the way to help address this issue, it does not provide a solution for families who cannot afford to purchase advance fares. A further improvement is the capping of fares at some locations so that the maximum residents will pay will be approximately \$400 per sector when booking return journeys.

The initial rollout of the program expansion happened in Mount Isa, Cloncurry, Longreach, Barcaldine, Blackall, Karratha and Kalgoorlie. Regional airports and councils in these towns committed to reducing the fees they charge each passenger, which are built into airfares.

Qantas is consulting with local airports and councils in the other towns in the program: Moranbah, Roma, Charleville, Broome, Port Hedland, Newman, Paraburdoo, Alice Springs and Yulara (Ayers Rock) and has called on these regional airports and councils to implement similar fee reductions for residents.

Following concerns that some privately owned airports were not taking on board capping of airfares, at the recent Joint Councils meeting, Federal President Alana Moller spoke with State Presidents on the possibility of State Councils approaching the relevant entities in their state to encourage them to consider capping.

In the meantime, we are maintaining our contact with QANTAS, and we will continue to raise this issue wherever possible.

Chaplaincy Program in Schools

Federal Council welcomed the announcement that the Australian Government is investing \$247 million over four years (2019-2022) to renew the National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP).

Federal Council wrote to Minister Tehan, Minister for Education and other relevant shadow ministers, passing on ICPA (Aust) 's appreciation for the announcement of further continued funding for the Chaplaincy program and reinforced the importance of and the need for ongoing funding for the Chaplaincy Program in rural and remote schools. ICPA (Aust) is heartened that funding will support approximately 3000 schools per year to access the services of a qualified chaplain including providing access to these services at our nation's most remote or very isolated areas. During our delegation meeting in October 2019 with Minister Tehan, Federal Council reinforced the Chaplaincy Program for our rural and remote students.

SPECIFIC EDUCATION NEEDS

There was one Specific Needs motion presented at the 2019 Federal Conference requesting that ICPA (Aust) approaches the Minister for Health and the Federal Treasurer to extend the Medicare rebate to include patients wishing to access speech pathology and paediatrician appointments through telehealth deliveries.

ICPA Federal Council contacted the Minister for Health, the Hon Greg Hunt MP, the Federal Treasurer, Hon Josh Frydenberg MP, the Minister for Finance, Senator the Hon Mathias Cormann, then Minister for Regional Services, Decentralisation and Local Government, the Hon Mark Coulton MP along with Shadow Ministers to raise this issue. On 5 November 2019, we received a reply from then Minister for Regional Services, Decentralisation and Local Government, the Hon Mark Coulton thanking us for raising the issue and bringing it to their attention. The main points from Minister Coulton's response were:

- An acknowledgement of the increased uptake of digital health technologies and the important role they are beginning to play in rural areas.

- Medicare items are available to paediatricians for both initial and subsequent consultations with patients.
- The Government has a 10-year plan focusing on primary healthcare in the short term, and in the longer term, aimed at reforming the system so that primary health providers are better equipped to assist those in rural and remote areas.
- The Government's Australian National Digital Health Strategy has highlighted the importance of digital health in the clinical setting. Under the Strategy, the Australian National Digital Health Agency is developing options to harmonise telehealth models by reviewing current use and addressing barriers to embedding telehealth services into clinical settings.

ICPA Federal Council was also informed that applications for new or amended medical services to receive public funding can be made to the Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC) which advises the Government about what services need to be on the Medicare Benefits Scheme Information on the MSAC application process can be found at www.msac.gov.au.

In June 2019, ICPA (Aust) provided comment on the Report of the Allied Health Reference Group: Review of the Allied Health MBS items and very clearly recommended that a Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) item number be allocated to speech pathology consultations by telehealth, not just for severe speech disorders, but also for any speech disorders which will affect education and wellbeing if left untreated.

ICPA (Aust) is represented on the council of the National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA), and a representative also sits on the Rural Digital Health Network Subcommittee, to ensure that rural families have a voice in the rollout of digital services in the future. In October 2019, ICPA (Aust) met with Dr Gabrielle O'Kane, the CEO of the National Rural Health Alliance and the topic of expansion of Medicare rebates to include telehealth for speech pathology was at the forefront of our conversations.

ICPA (Aust), along with numerous other organisations such as Speech Pathology Australia and NRHA, will be continuing to lobby for the application of a Medicare rebate item number to speech pathologist consultations by telehealth.

TERTIARY

The 2019 tertiary motion update begins by welcoming the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy – Final Report* (Naphthine Report) which contains positive recommendations for our rural and remote tertiary cohort. It is pleasing to see rural and remote tertiary students' issues with accessing tertiary education being brought to the forefront of governments' minds. Despite significant changes in the tertiary sphere especially around Youth Allowance for rural and remote students, the Tertiary Portfolio will continue to address the motions and previous unresolved motions that highlight the ongoing issues that our tertiary cohort face when accessing higher education.

National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy – Final Report (Naphthine Report)

In August 2019, *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy – Final Report* was released. Following the release, the Minister for Education indicated that the Government accepts the aims of the recommendations, and the specific actions of the recommendations would be considered. The measures would more than likely require a policy change, sector reform and involve budget allocation along with collaboration between state and territory governments and the Federal Government.

The report contains 7 recommendations: Improve access to study options, improve financial support, improve other student supports, provide better career advice and strengthen regional, rural and remote schools, enhance support for equity groups, develop regional communities and establish national mechanisms to support the Strategy. There are 33 associated actions which include expanding Regional Study Hubs, improve internet access, introduce a new tertiary education access payment, reduce earnings requirements of Concessional Workforce criteria, improve information on financial support and improving career advice in schools, all very positive for our rural and remote students.

Tertiary Access Allowance (TAA) and Relocation Scholarship

TAA - Federal Council has continued to highlight the long-standing motion for the introduction of a Tertiary Access Allowance (TAA) through correspondence to Government and during our delegation to Canberra in October 2019. The TAA remains one of our Tertiary Portfolio priorities. The Tertiary Access Allowance amounts are aligned with the Relocation Scholarship amounts, and ICPA (Aust) has strongly advocated for the Tertiary Access Allowance for rural and remote students irrespective of eligibility for Youth Allowance.

The National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy – Final Report contained the following recommendation:

Recommendation two: Improve access to financial support, to support greater fairness and more equal opportunity by: introducing a new tertiary education access payment for students who relocate for study from an outer regional or remote area.

The recommended tertiary education access payment of \$5,000 is proposed to be available to all school leavers that relocate from outer regional or remote areas to undertake full-time higher level tertiary education. During delegation, Federal Council encouraged all politicians we met with to support the recommendations from the report.

Relocation Scholarship - While on delegation, many Youth Allowance issues were discussed with Services Australia and the Department of Social Services. The Department of Social Services again reinforced that the Relocation Scholarship is an adjunct payment and not available as a standalone payment.

Youth Allowance

Eligibility - Federal Council has pursued the motion requesting changes in the eligibility criteria for Youth Allowance as an independent for rural and remote students. The National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy – Final Report contained recommendations for independence Youth Allowance including:

Recommendation two: Improve access to financial support, to support greater fairness and more equal opportunity by: allowing greater flexibility in pathways to qualify for independent Youth Allowance.

This recommendation enables rural and remote students who successfully undertake their first year of tertiary study externally to access independent Youth Allowance or independent ABSTUDY if they then relocate their place of study for a minimum of one further year.

Removal of Independent Youth Allowance parental threshold – The above recommendation also incorporates reviewing the recent changes to the parental means test cut-off.

Liquid Assets Waiting Period – The Department of Families and Social Services has reinforced that the Liquid Assets Waiting Period is applied if liquid assets are over \$5,500 for a single student. It is tapered

up to \$11,500 meaning there is a 13-week maximum waiting period before payments will commence. Under Youth Allowance rules, a tertiary student's liquid assets may be reduced by allowable deductions either incurred or likely to be incurred relating to their course including up-front course fees, HECS-HELP payments, student union fees and costs of textbooks and tools or equipment required to undertake the course.

Youth Allowance Overview 2020 - We have updated the Youth Allowance Overview in consultation with Services Australia. The 2020 Overview is available in January 2020 Pedals and on the ICPA (Aust) website [here](#) for members to use as a guide to Youth Allowance eligibility and application.

Centrelink

Wait time on 132490 phone line - ICPA (Aust) has collaborated with Services Australia concerning the issues that members are reporting when applying for Youth Allowance. In addition, correspondence was sent to the Minister for Government Services on several Centrelink issues. In regards to the issue of unacceptable wait times that our rural and remote students are enduring, the Minister reinforced that additional operators have been employed and the Department is aiming to streamline services to reduce the need for customers to call and provide a service that allows better access to face-to-face, telephone and online service.

Centrelink staff and misinformation – ICPA (Aust) has been assured again that Centrelink staff manning the 132490 phone line have extensive training and have the resources to answer all queries efficiently and where a Youth Allowance, ABSTUDY or Austudy enquiry is complex, staff have access to assistance from specialist staff. We emphasised that this does not always occur and for our members, this misinformation can have devastating consequences including rejection of a claim, a claim not being submitted because they believe they are not eligible, or a payment being cancelled. We have forwarded issues as they have been brought to our attention through an avenue available to us which is not available to the general public, unfortunately.

We encourage any member who has contact with the 132490 phone service or attends a Centrelink office, Access Point or Agent to obtain a reference number for their visit or call which can be used later in the event of misinformation. While ICPA (Aust) cannot contact Centrelink on behalf of a member because of Privacy Laws, we can contact them with the issue generally. Services Australia is keen to be informed of any issues as part of their quality and improvement processes. Federal Council will forward information and present suggestions to the Department in relation to the Youth Allowance application online process and the current website.

Call Back Service - The Minister for Government Services, in his correspondence said the Department has trialled and implemented a call back service for other services but this has not and is not in their plans to implement a call back service for youth and student services including AIC and YA. The service overall is always under review in respect to efficiency and customer service.

Proof of Identity – ICPA (Aust) has been told the reason a student is required to present to a Centrelink office, access point or agent to prove their identity is to protect individuals from identity theft and other forms of identity fraud. In the instance of a claimant having “genuine difficulty” in attending a rural and remote Access Point or Agent to meet the identity requirements, alternative identity provisions can be applied and other channels used to lodge identity documents. A list of Access Points and Agents where identity documents can be lodged and identity confirmed is available at <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/topics/confirm-your-identity/29166>.

Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships Program (RRESP)

While on delegation in November 2019, Federal Council met with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment and discussed the RRESP. At that time, Round 3 was being administered, and further rounds depended on the acquittal of the program to date.

Excitingly Round 4 of the RRESP has been announced with applications opening 20 January 2020 and remaining open throughout 2020 with offers made on an ongoing basis through the 2020 academic year or until available scholarships are fully allocated. This round gives further consideration to students affected by drought and bushfire. The scholarships which remain valued at up to \$18,000, are available to support regional and remote students studying in any discipline from Certificate IV to PhD level with an eligible higher education provider or vocational education and training institution from six months full-time and up to 8 years part-time, on campus, or through online and distance education. There is an additional \$500 to support an internship.

The scholarships are for applicants that have commenced the first year of their eligible Course of Study in Semester 1, 2020 and be continuing in Semester 2 or be starting in Semester 2 of 2020. The QTAC site mentions if an applicant has been unsuccessful for one round, they can get feedback on their application and may be able to submit a new application in a future scholarship round. In terms of untimely payments being experienced, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment assured us that there had been issues identified with the timing of payments and they were working with QTAC to rectify the delays. Recipients of the scholarships have obligations within the Scholarship agreement, and the prompt return of these throughout their scholarship helps in part to ensure their payments are timely.

Teacher Education Training in Specific Learning Needs

ICPA (Aust) contacted the Australian Councils of Deans of Education (ACDE) urging them to encourage education providers to recognise the unique circumstances surrounding the learning context of rural and remote students and ensure all teachers preparing to work in geographically isolated schools, are trained in specific learning needs including Autism Spectrum Disorder. To date, we have not had a reply. In previous years, ACDE has responded positively stating they would take this request to their Board, but ultimately university course content is up to the individual university, and ACDE can only make recommendations.

Along with following up on issues we have not yet had a response to, ICPA (Aust) will continue to progress and raise the profile of our members' issues through the avenues available to us at every opportunity and we will inform members of any developments.

TRAINING

Closure of Agricultural Colleges

The closure of Queensland's Emerald and Longreach Agricultural Colleges and the attempted closure of Moora Residential College in WA has been of concern to rural people across the nation.

Qld ICPA Tertiary, Trade and Training Portfolio holder, Louise Winten, attended a meeting in Longreach in November 2019. ICPA Qld was hopeful of a resolution such that facilities and accommodation will continue to be used for education and training and be available for use by the local community. ICPA Queensland has been continuing talks with TAFE and universities.

The Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries, The Honourable Mark Furner, made a media statement "An agreement on the future of Longreach Agricultural Training College" (19 February 2020). In summary:

The Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD) will sign an initial agreement to occupy the former Longreach campus through to November 2020 which will allow RAPAD to accommodate community events, training and commercial interests and retain the former College's memorabilia and other historical elements.

RAPAD is an employment, training and regional development organisation and not-for-profit company whose members included the Longreach, Winton, Diamantina, Boulia, Blackall-Tambo, Barcoo and Barcaldine regional councils. Agreement was reached in accordance with the deliberations of the local consultative stakeholder committee and consultation and input from the local community. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries will continue to maintain the college assets in partnership with RAPAD as a more permanent occupancy arrangement is negotiated. The agreement was only the first stage of what will become a more permanent arrangement. Minister Furner said negotiations on the future of the Emerald facility are continuing.

The full media statement can be found at:

<http://statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2020/2/19/agreement-on-future-of-longreach-agricultural-training-college> .

In an article in the Rural Weekly (6 March 2020), RAPAD Chairman, Cr Rob Chandler said they would continue to work with the state government to transition the College into a local entity in the next five years. A business case is being developed during the interim occupancy period until November 2020. A previous College board member, Rosemary Champion, expressed concern about the short time frame of the occupancy agreement, the loss of teachers and resources from the district already and considers there has been nothing achieved to continue agricultural education in western Qld so far. RAPAD acknowledges such community concerns and CEO Mr David Arnold seems confident agricultural training will be part of the future for the site, but that training and education will go wider than just agriculture.

In WA, Moora Residential College's largely federally-funded building upgrade is progressing and on 19 February 2020, the Deputy Prime Minister, Hon Michael McCormack MP, visited to view the progress with Hon Martin Aldridge MLC, Member for Agricultural Region and Hon Mia Davies MLA, Member for Central Wheatbelt and Leader of The Nationals WA.